

LETTER NO. 23

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E2L56UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
EXTENSION SERVICE
Washington 25, D. C.August 27, 1947
For your information

TO STATE FARM LABOR SUPERVISORS OF FLORIDA, GEORGIA, SOUTH CAROLINA, NORTH CAROLINA, VIRGINIA, MARYLAND, DELAWARE, PENNSYLVANIA, NEW JERSEY, NEW YORK, CONNECTICUT, TENNESSEE, AND OHIO

Subject: Atlantic Coast Migratory Movement

VIRGINIA

Accomac County is using all labor available to it for the present. Carl Arvin, Farm Labor Assistant, is on the lookout for crews passing through that might be routed to Delaware.

In Northampton County there has been some slowing down of activity due to the price of tomatoes. Workers are somewhat restless but it is hoped they can be persuaded to wait in the area a little while longer since they will be needed when price difficulties disappear. At present there are 116 workers in the Cheriton Camp and 150 in growers' quarters.

MARYLAND

Maryland cannot be considered a source of migrants for placement in other northern States during the remainder of the season. As the tomato deal comes to an end, sweet corn, sweet potatoes, and late beans come in. Bill Hillman says he has good employment through September and early October for the 2,600 migrants now in the State. It is anticipated that many families will leave for the South around the first of September in order to get children in school. There may be a few crews, families, or individuals who because of special circumstances, will be available for employment in other northern areas, however, no large numbers of workers can be expected from this State.

DELAWARE

Workers needed. Hot weather has speeded all crop maturities. Tomatoes, beans, and fruit are all coming in so fast that all present labor resources are being taxed beyond capacity. The number involved is not great but the need is urgent. If any of us know of crews that are at loose ends, we can help the cause of good labor placement by getting in touch with any of the following:

W. H. Henderson
County Agricultural Agent
Georgetown, Delaware
Phone: 21

F. P. Neyland
Farm Labor Assistant
Dover, Delaware
Phone: 2886

Edward Schabinger
County Agricultural Agent
Newark, Delaware
Phone: 511

Kenneth Branner
Farm Labor Assistant
Middletown, Delaware
Phone: 92

PHILADELPHIA MEETING

The State supervisors of New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania, with key placement men were invited to meet in Philadelphia yesterday to get machinery and procedures set for the last mass movement of migrants before the return South. In the main, this will be a movement from New Jersey to New York and Pennsylvania for fall potatoes and fruit. Jack Taylor's staff has handled this movement in fine style for the past two years.

A D. Cobb represented the Federal office at this meeting. O. W. Nealy was also there.

NEW JERSEY

New Jersey employment is at peak. Everybody seems to be working with no great shortage or surplus for the time being. No great labor movement from this State can be expected until we get well into September. The whole New Jersey staff is set to aid migrants to pass to other States as they finish their New Jersey contracts.

INFORMATION FOR OPERATIONS is much more succulent than information for the archives. We are finding current migratory interview sheets even a better tool in operation than we had expected. A. D. Cobb is summarizing the future plans of migrants as shown on the sheets received and passing the information on to areas that need to know about worker availability.

THE BOX SCORE
(To August 25, 1947)

	Crew Records	No. of Workers
Virginia	22	156
Maryland	18	415
Delaware	10	534
Pennsylvania	0	0
New Jersey	76	1,797
New York	38	1,363
	164	4,265

HOUSING COSTS - WAGE LEVELS - FARM LABOR COOPERATIVES

The retransfer of responsibility for the housing of migrants from the government to farmers has already progressed far enough for some of the pitfalls and dangers to emerge. It is already apparent that the assumption of this responsibility by farmer cooperatives is a field where much remains to be learned, either by the laborious and expensive trial and error method or by a careful and realistic approach to the many puzzling problems involved in establishing mutually profitable and satisfactory employment relationships between groups of workers and groups of employers. This will be especially difficult where employers have been accustomed to dealing with employees only as individuals or where the use of regimented foreign labor has made too lasting an impression. It will also be only somewhat less difficult where employers have been accustomed to dealing as individuals with groups of workers.

It is anticipated that during the 1948 harvest season the cooperative use and housing of migrants on the Atlantic Seaboard by farmers will greatly increase. The most useful service Extension Service Farm Labor personnel can render during the fall and winter months is in aiding farmers to identify and understand the basic problems that will confront them. The organizing of cooperatives, financing the purchase of camps, and putting them into good physical condition are very real problems, but they are not basic. Comfortable and healthful camps will contribute to a satisfactory employment relationship. They will not insure it. They will be filled with reluctant and discontented workers who are there because they have nowhere else to go unless more fundamental and difficult problems have been faced realistically and solved. It is very doubtful that these problems will be faced by farmers and thought through before the camps open unless these matters are brought to their attention now.

One of the more basic problems confronting the users of Atlantic Coast migratory labor is discussed below. What is said here on this subject is not nearly so important as it is that cooperative groups be aware of the problem, face it realistically and adopt policies and procedures that will enable them to develop the migratory movement into a dependable source of good and cheerful workers for their area.

The consumer ultimately bears the cost of housing farm labor along with all other farm costs. The consumer's payment on the housing account can reach the migrant only through the farmer. The farmer in turn may pay the worker a relatively high wage and require him to furnish his own shelter or may pay a relatively low wage and furnish the housing himself. Wage levels and housing costs are, therefore, inseparable.

Industry has generally fixed wage levels on the theory that workers are to meet housing costs out of wages. Agricultural employers generally, because of the usual necessity for workers to live on farm property, have paid the relatively low wage and furnished housing. Indeed, it would seem impractical for migratory workers to furnish their own living quarters. Both logic and custom, therefore, operated to establish agricultural wage levels based on the assumption that housing will be a part of the remuneration the farm workers will receive for his services.

On the Atlantic Seaboard, free housing to migrants was almost universal so long as only workers and farmers were concerned. However, when the government began supplying housing through the Farm Security Administration, it relieved the farmer of the necessity of transmitting to the worker any part of the consumer's dollar which he received on account of housing. Further, it collected a rental fee from the workers. The net result was that cost of housing was transferred from the farmer to the government and the migrant.

Now, since it is apparent that the government is going to cease substituting for the employer in providing housing, farmers will be forced to reexamine the position in which they find themselves.

Must the farmer again divert to migrant housing that part of the consumer's dollar he has temporarily been allowed to use for purposes more personal to himself? Is there an alternative? If he makes the necessary expenditures and attempts to recover from workers through rental charges he immediately finds that

in securing good workers he is at a competitive disadvantage with farmers and communities that charge housing costs to operating expense rather than to migrants. He will soon find that for him the migratory movement has become a most uncertain source of labor and that only those that are not wanted elsewhere are available to him.

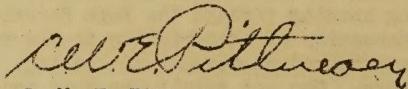
If he tries to avoid providing housing by directing his migrants to rental housing owned by third parties his relief is illusory and very fleeting for he finds that he will have to increase the wage he pays them by the amount of the rent they pay or finds himself again at a competitive disadvantage with employers who furnish free housing.

There have already appeared instances where newly formed farm labor cooperatives have apparently assumed that their members ought to be able to use outside labor about as cheaply as they could labor for which they do not furnish housing, and on this assumption attempts have been made to recover a considerable part of the housing costs by charging migrants substantial rental fees. In at least one instance, migrant camp occupants found themselves forced to work at a wage rate materially lower than local workers received on the same job at the same time on the theory that the community was making expenditures in their behalf that it was not making on behalf of local workers. Of course, the effect of this would be to shift the cost of housing from employers to workers. It also would tend to establish the principle that where wage rates have evolved with farmers customarily furnishing housing they must be raised when any substantial part of this cost is transferred to workers. It remains to be said that in the instances mentioned here there were no satisfactory use of migrants.

There can be no question but that our farm labor cooperatives that are now forming ought to face realistically this fundamental relationship of housing costs and wage levels before formulating policies and long before a steady supply of willing workers are needed to harvest matured crops.

However important this question of wage scales and housing costs is, it is only one of several basic problems that must be solved before the Atlantic Coast Migratory Movement can be depended upon as a continuing supply of willing and efficient workers. Perhaps future letters will discuss others.

Very truly yours,



C. W. E. Pittman
Southeastern Area Director
Recruitment and Placement Division
Extension Farm Labor Program

